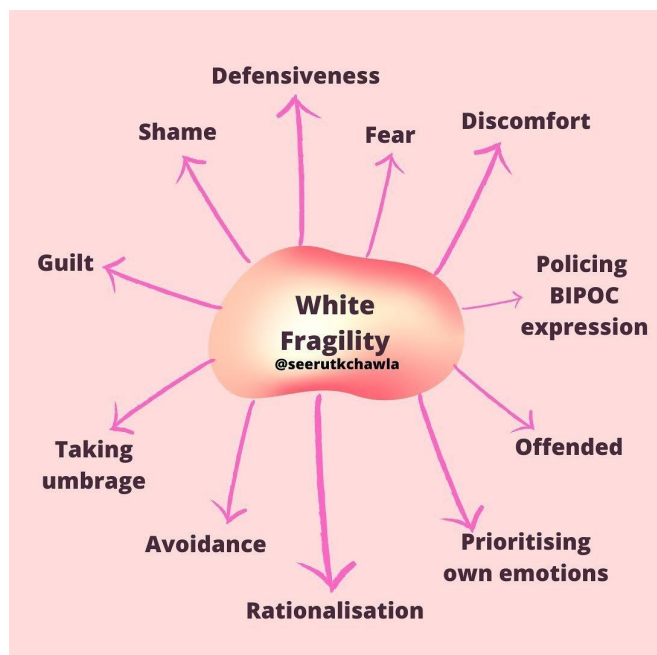


To the Board and Staff of Country Dance & Song Society:

A hallmark of CDSS is asking members and communities - what can we do for you? This is our answer to that question.

As CDSS members, we have received communications regarding anti-racist work in which the organization is now starting to engage. Our intention with this letter is to disrupt your current process as you take on anti-racism work as an organization, challenge this work to be more effective, and point the organization in a new direction. Our hope is that you will stop doing harm to the community through performative allyship, reflect on your role in anti-racism work, and start again.



Infographic credits:

The infographics "White Fragility," "Weaponized White Fragility," "Performative Allyship," and "Authentic Allyship" are by Seerut K. Chawla, MBACP and were posted publicly to Instagram on June 3 & 5 by the author. We reached out to the author for permission to use her work; the author does not respond to public communications so we have made a contribution to Black Lives Matter in her name.

We are writing as individuals, dancers, artists, and organizers in the North American folk community, and as members of CDSS. We are also writing as fallible middle class white people who are descended from white settlers and colonists, and perpetuate their racist legacy whether we intend to or not.

We are not the only people who are working to understand our whiteness and engage in anti-racism work, and we are new to it, too. We acknowledge the many Black leaders, Indigenous leaders and Leaders of Color¹, who originated this movement and continue to lead. We are following their direction. And, we mess up all the time. As fellow white people, we are continually learning about our implicit bias, how we are complicit in white supremacy and structural racism, and how we can do better. It is with humility and in solidarity that we offer our feedback and analysis.

We will communicate with you in a straight-forward, honest and responsible manner. We anticipate that some of the things we communicate in this letter will be uncomfortable to hear. As a result, you may have responses informed by white fragility², such as: guilt, shame, discomfort, rationalization, and taking offense. We too, experience these reactions when we confront our own racism.

As white participants of folk traditions, we feel a shared responsibility to ensure our fellow white allies do not stray

¹ "People of Color" is a white-centered term, describing anyone who is non-white. We acknowledge that this term is problematic in that it erases the specific issues faced by different racial groups and perpetuates the myth that all non-whites occur as a monolithic interest group. We also acknowledge that racial justice leaders like The BIPOC Project are using the term to, "highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black (African Americans) people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people of color within a U.S. context." (Work found at www.thebipocproject.org) We are using the term in solidarity with The BIPOC Project's approach.

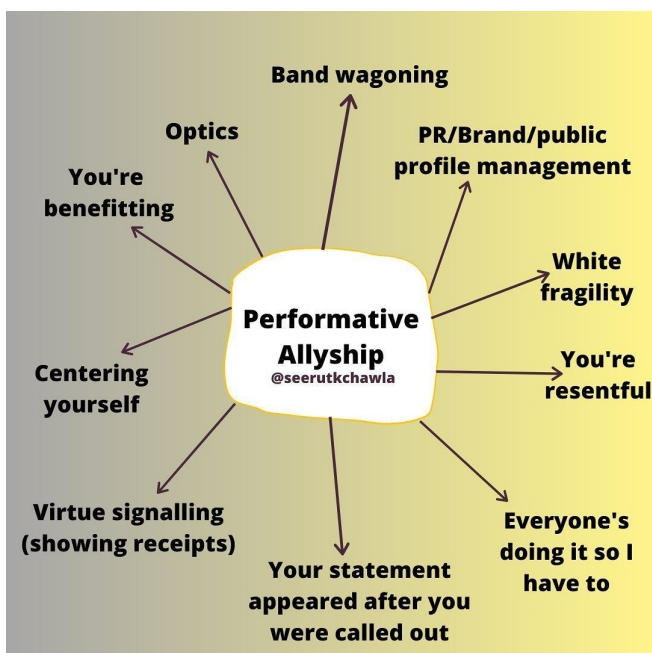
² This term for the defensiveness white people experience in conversations about race and racial interactions was likely coined by Robin DiAngelo, and is based on a legacy of work by Black scholars researching implicit bias.

from meaningful work that challenges and dismantles entrenched systems that perpetuate racism. Our hope is that we can aid one another in learning and correcting courses by being candid with each other about the most common and most ingrained ways of straying from authentic allyship. Our intention is to provide you with a learning opportunity.

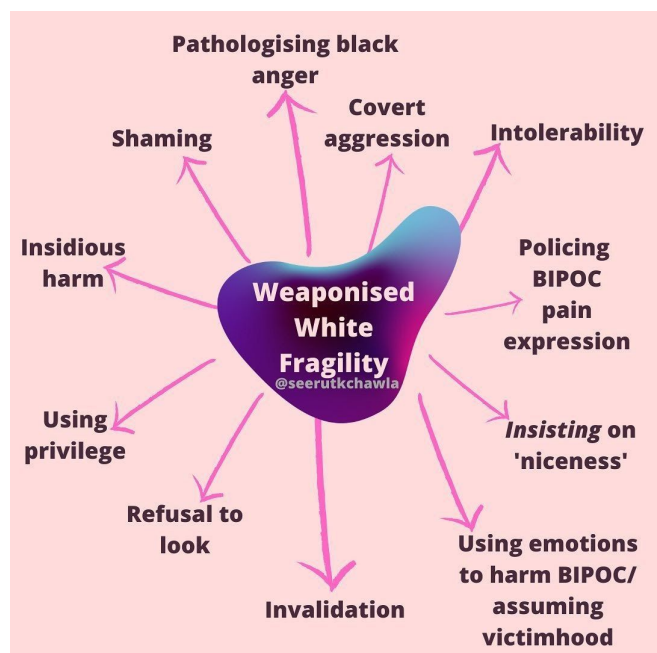
Noticing Performative Allyship & White Fragility in CDSS Race-Related Messaging

You have sent out two emails, the second one a signed letter by the Executive Director, about your anti-racism work and have summarized one of these communications in an additional eNews email. We reviewed the CDSS news, website, and recent newsletter to ensure this was indeed your first explicit anti-racist work.

Insomuch as CDSS is a trusted resource for so many within the folk community, your work and communications provide implicit and explicit training for members and affiliates. By being trusted, you have a responsibility to use your power and influence well. Currently, your anti-racism work is occurring as performative allyship. As a result, you are also training the community to engage in performative allyship.



Infographic by Seerut K. Chawla, MBACP



Infographic by Seerut K. Chawla, MBACP

How Performative Allyship shows up in your work and communications:

- Band wagoning
 - Like the rest of white organizational America, CDSS saw many other organizations sending letters of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and sent out a letter of your own.
- Centering yourself:
 - The extent of CDSS's anti-racism work is currently: making broad statements; sharing links to people's work without context, permission, or compensation; falsely claiming to own history by simultaneously glorifying Cecil Sharp while calling him a racist; and general encouragement of anti-racism actions. From this starting point, CDSS isn't engaging from a true desire to reframe the national white-centered folk tradition. Instead, you're seeking credit for baby steps and others' work. As you are a leadership organization in the field, it is harmful to call these

marketing tasks anti-racism work, and harmful to encourage your stakeholders to bandwagon. CDSS should only be centering itself in the genuine work actually done within the organization.

- Brand management:
 - A large focus of CDSS's work is to "harvest"³ the work of others without paying them for their labor, aggregate the content in a CDSS Resource Portal and then use your platform to brand the content as available thanks to CDSS. This habituated appropriation is one of the core practices of CDSS, so much so that it is a lived value.
 - In these two communications CDSS has once again appropriated the work of others (specifically Pamela Bailey, Brandi Waller-Pace, and Lorelei Batislaong) who are experts in their field, offering their work as resources without compensating the authors or **first** acknowledging and celebrating that the work has been ongoing and driving people to their platform Decolonizing the Music Room.
 - In your communications, you send people directly to your social platforms (Facebook, CDSS Resource Portal) to access content by BIPOC artists who have their own platforms, thus, increasing traffic to your own platforms.
- You're benefiting:
 - In these communications and in CDSS's Statement of Inclusivity, the organization has created a safe space for inaction with no means for community accountability. Without specific actions planned for the future, nor any metrics attached to broad value statements and focus areas, CDSS could continue doing all of the same things it currently does without criticism. This mechanism enables you to justify any level of action or inaction.
 - Both of your communications are designed to make you look like "good" allies and drive people to your platforms.
- Virtue signalling:
 - In both communications, CDSS states that, "we think it's most important to listen and learn from Black voices right now." Yes. But, this statement without authentic work by white people in a majority white community that has a very clear history of white supremacy has the impact of reading as tokenism.⁴ The statement combined with your actions, says, "we're listening," but doesn't say that you're doing anything effective with what you hear.
 - In the second communication, you create a list of all of the things you have done or will be doing to "enact our core value of inclusivity and combat racism." This listicle was created to fill out a longer email to express further engagement in anti-racist work, while much of its content is ineffective or harmful.
- Your statement appeared after you were called out:
 - Your second email is as a response to being called out by community members. The first email occurred as cursory and tokenistic, so the community called you out and you created a second, longer email signed by your Executive Director.

³ A term Cecil Sharp used frequently in his appropriative work, for instance in English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians

⁴ The concept of tokenism was explored by Martin Luther King and applied to anti-Black racism in Why We Can't Wait. It refers to the symbolic placement of individuals from minority groups to achieve an appearance of equality.

How Weaponized White Fragility shows up in your work and communications:

- Insidious harm:
 - By stating “we are owning our history” while simultaneously perpetuating harmful white-centered history, you teach readers that rebranding white-centered history is the way to own your history. *This subtlety is incredibly important.*
 - The continued erasure of history and oppression of Black artists is subtle, gradual, and harmful. Combatting insidious harm requires naming the harmful traditions that have been perpetuated by CDSS, something you have not effectively done. You are not seeing yourself as an actor in this living history.
 - CDSS is claiming that the most important work right now is to be quiet and listen and learn from Black voices, as though that listening and amplification cannot be done alongside the work of re-educating ourselves on the history of oppression within white folk traditions and taking action. This gives CDSS permission to not engage.
- Refusal to look:
 - The first two sentences of the first email name a history of racism and cultural appropriation within CDSS and make it seem like CDSS is facing this. However, those statements are not backed up by what follows: linking work created by Black women and women of color who are actively practicing decolonization and anti-racism. This is their work, and you appropriated it by not centering their organization, contextualizing it, paying them, or sharing how members could pay them.
 - Further, sharing articles without contextualizing why you’re sharing them is a missed opportunity for education and transformative change within the folkways system. For a community that is just starting to look, throwing information out without context contributes more to people floundering around in a sea of information than contributing to helping people navigate to *new ways of looking* that dismantle racist structures.
 - CDSS evades its role as a leader, pushing the work to affiliates and members; the way you consistently invite community contribution is by sharing resources that will go into a Resource Portal or to a Facebook page. CDSS chose not to focus its messages on history and what CDSS has done to support the white-centered, white-authored history that persists in these folkways; instead, the messages focus on the importance of “taking this journey together.” It is good to share resources, but simply throwing information into a folder doesn’t facilitate the transformative change necessary in practicing anti-racism.
- Using privilege:
 - You have a large audience of members, artists and organizers throughout North America and the world. These performative messages are designed to make you look like “good” allies, not catalyze real change or real action.
- Insisting on ‘niceness’:
 - Your messages are very nice, making it more palatable for white people to feel “good” and remain complicit in structural racism. This structural racism is violence expressed in many forms, and engaging in anti-racism work will require you to prioritize addressing violence over writing for palatability.
- Assuming victimhood:
 - In your second email signed by the Executive Director, you spent eight sentences centering yourself by saying, in essence, that you feel uncomfortable sharing work as you do it and putting on the victim’s “brave face.” As a white-led organization, CDSS board members and staff should react in private.

- This assumption of victimhood takes up the precious space where members are reading your first public thoughts on racism in American folkways. This teaches them that part of anti-racism work is publicly expressing victimhood.

By sending two communications that were both performative, you have communicated that you do not know how to do this work outside of performative allyship. What is actually occurring is that you are simply creating a placeholder for the community so we can all give you a pass. Further, as a leader CDSS is inviting members and affiliates to join in performative allyship.

Possible Steps Toward Authentic Allyship

As community members and CDSS members, we need more from you. A path to authentic allyship is available.

We Urge You to Take the Following Actions:

- Stop and Reflect
- Tell the Truth
- Do the Work--Now and Ongoing--as a Leadership Team
- Leverage the CDSS Budget

We expand upon these actions below.



Infographic by Seerut K. Chawla, MBACP

Stop & Reflect

Before sending another communication, please stop and reflect:

What actions are you taking simply to “look good”? Where are you continuing to cause harm? What is the racial history of your organization? What does your race have to do with the way you see the world and run your organization? What meaningful action can you take as individuals in an organization? What is your role in anti-racism work in these folkways? How can you provide meaningful resources to your members and affiliates in ways that don’t perpetuate appropriation? What unique privileges and resources do you have that you can leverage in this work? What actions would be truly transformative in a system entrenched in systemic racism? How do you want to responsibly call in community members? Are there people who are in opposition to this work and, if so, how will you responsibly call them in or

out? What roles or processes need to change? Do you have the best team to do this work and, if not, what needs to change? How can you take action, even as it feels uncomfortable and not everyone may agree? How much of your reputation are you willing to risk to do this work? Are there stands you need to take? What might you need to dismantle? How can you stay committed to this work in a sustainable way? How do you want to share your work going forward?

We recognize this is complex, foundation-shaking work. If you don't know the answers to these questions, it's better to take the time to reflect than to perform. Ask yourselves where you need help.



This infographic "Becoming Anti-Racist" was created by Dr. Andrew Ibrahim MD, MSc and was inspired by the work of Dr. Ibram Kendi. Dr. Ibrahim gave permission for this graphic to be shared.

Tell the Truth

The core message to CDSS members was said simply in your second email, "Today, we're starting..."

Before the groundswell of mainstream white support for the Black Lives Matter movement precipitated by the murder of George Floyd, many white people were not engaged in anti-racism work because it didn't directly impact their lives negatively and it was more comfortable to ignore structural racism. CDSS was complicit in this silence. And, now, you're engaging. Say that. Acknowledge it. Apologize for the harm caused by being complicit in the erasure of history throughout the life of the organization. Apologize for hiding the uncomfortable.

After apologizing, the organization has a lot more to reckon with and communicate. According to the CDSS website, the organization was founded in 1915. CDSS's work is built on a legacy that includes complex narratives and multiple stories of oppression that include colonialism and white supremacy. Since its founding, CDSS's work has perpetuated the erasure of the history of free and enslaved Black Africans and African-descended Black Americans who generated cultural goods (instruments, musical styles, practices like calling) as they were co-opted and popularized by white colonizers. Square dance, contra dance, folk/group song, and other practices in American folkways all exist today as cultural mosaics, and CDSS has had an active role in appropriation and erasure, and has not committed to telling the whole story.

Since the birth of CDSS, the organization has celebrated Cecil Sharp's work without question and the foundation of CDSS is grounded in Sharp's approaches as lived values. Sharp professionalized the continued colonization of American folkways in his role as a wealthy English collector; in his own words, he "harvested" folk song and dance traditions from others, naming himself expert after briefly being a tourist in communities and cultures he didn't belong to.

In your communications to date, you've celebrated Cecil Sharp as a "passionate student of English and Anglo-American folk traditions who boldly ventured into white mountain communities and collected their music with great care and respect" while acknowledging that his "racist and anglo-centric worldview impacted the way he told the world about his journeys, and meant that he missed the opportunity to fully understand and document the complex evolution of dance, music, and song on this continent." This is a sugarcoated story that exemplifies a refusal to look and name the whole history. This is erasure. This is violence. Sharp did not "miss an opportunity." Sharp actively included white cultural contributors by seeking them out and actively erased Black contributors by refusing to speak to them. The lives of white people, Indigenous people and Black people in Appalachia had been culturally and socially intertwined starting in the early 1600s; by the time that Sharp arrived in the early 1900s, the cultural mosaic in these folkways had been actively formed for nearly three centuries.⁵ Cecil Sharp was an oppressor, and CDSS is his legacy. By speaking this way, CDSS perpetuates the white supremacist norm that Sharp's contributions come first and his racism is simply an unfortunate burden of his legacy.⁶ This harmful rhetoric is a continuation of a white-centered history that CDSS chooses to share widely, and as an authority on the subject.

This bias toward centering white history is demonstrated throughout CDSS content. When visiting the CDSS website, for instance, minimal content is presented that tells the whole story. As an example, on your page titled "About Square Dances,"⁷ which is a page about the history of square dance, you ignore the history of Black African cultural contributions.⁸ There is only one resource that hints at a fuller history, a May 2020 link to a RadioLab episode, yet this episode is presented without context. Additionally, on this page there are links to articles that celebrate Henry Ford and Benjamin Lovett's contributions to the popularization of square dance without any context that speaks to their anti-semitic and racist agenda.⁹

⁵ *See Webb, Althea. "African Americans in Appalachia". Found at <https://oxfordaasc.com/page/featured-essay-african-americans-in-appalachia>

⁶ See context provided by Ann Ostendorf. "Song Catchers, Ballad Makers, and New Social Historians: The Historiography of Appalachian Music." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2004, pp. 192–202. Found at www.jstor.org/stable/42631932.

⁷ CDSS: About Squares: <https://www.cdss.org/about-squares>

⁸ See context provided by Philip Jamison in "Square Dance Calling: The African-American Connection." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003, pp. 387–398. Findable at www.jstor.org/stable/41446577.

⁹ See context provided by Emery C. Warnock "The Anti-Semitic Origins of Henry Ford's Arts Education Patronage." *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2009, pp. 79–102. Found at www.jstor.org/stable/40215355.

We urge you to hire experts to scrutinize your content and make edits that enable telling the whole truth. We suggest that these experts be Black artists and scholars from within this field. We insist that you pay these experts fairly. In the meantime, we suggest that you tell the truth in your communications, naming on your website, for instance, that you've been complicit in the erasure of this history and you're actively reviewing your content to provide the fuller picture.

Do the Work--Now and Ongoing--as a Leadership Team

We urge you to hire experts to train you in scrutinizing and transforming your organization.¹⁰ We suggest that these experts be Black consultants familiar with both organizational development and anti-racism work. We insist that you pay these experts fairly.

Potential Action Items:

- Ask yourselves if you are doing anti-racism work or simply projecting allyship.
- Analyze your organization's core norms and see where you're continuing to perpetuate white supremacy and cultural appropriation.
- Critically analyze how CDSS is complicit in structural racism and in promulgating a system that has resulted in a primarily white community:
 - CDSS has the benefit of a large constituency that includes folk organizers across the whole of North America. Take responsibility in that role and commit to doing the work on behalf of the North American community to distinguish the barriers created by the community that limit participation by Black artists and other marginalized groups.
 - Actively work in your leadership role to support organizers in dismantling those barriers locally.
- Participate in effective strategic planning as an organization that expands your values to actionable tactics. Focus on measurable outcomes instead of murky generalizations and "feel good" statements.
- Adopt approaches that enable continual, sustainable and genuine organizational and individual CDSS stakeholder reflection and transformation.
- Again, regularly ask yourselves if you are doing anti-racism work or simply projecting allyship.

We all live submersed in the products and traditions of white supremacy in the United States. Take the time to see how it functions within your organization at its core. Welcome earthquakes where you have built decades of infrastructure.

Leverage the CDSS Budget

A budget is where an organization aligns money with priorities. Currently, CDSS's budget reflects unfair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources. The many inequities include, but are not limited to: creators are not paid for the work that is consolidated in the CDSS archives; artists are not adequately paid for their labor at camps; camp participation is limited to either those who can afford to go or forced to labor in exchange for tuition; and marginalized community members are underrepresented in content and at events.

Invest in the community whose history you helped erase and in communities of people who experience barriers to participation in these folkways. Inclusion is not enough, as it can be synonymous with continued acculturation into white cultural norms and further erasure that amounts to tokenism. As a majority white,

¹⁰ An example of a firm leading in this work is the Harden Consulting Group, co-founded by Dr. Kimberly Harden and Tai Harden-Moore. Found at <https://www.hardenconsultinggroup.com>

non-disabled¹¹, cisgender hetero-normative community whose older Revivalist population is aging out, a core way to ensure a healthy and thriving future for these folkways is to reverse the economic disinvestment we've engaged in as a community and help more people of more identities feel a sense of belonging and ownership. Strive for cultural equity¹², with an intersectional lens.

We believe the CDSS budget should be used to:

- Publicly denounce the white-centered history CDSS has taught, admit erasure, and share the true history of American folkways
 - Hire consultants to collect research related to history that you helped erase and promote it, with context, within the community
 - Commission research about the contributions of Black people who created and authored much of our current beloved culture
- Hire and promote Black and BIPOC artists, organizers, experts, and business owners
 - Develop relationships with and directly invest in BIPOC artists and organizers
 - Don't just say "pay Black artists"; feature Black artists and specifically model how to pay them fairly
 - Partner with BIPOC-led organizations already engaged in decolonization and equity work (financially and in other ways) and provide them with a larger platform for their work by giving them access to use your platform and communicate with your audience in a genuine way
 - Buy supplies and resources from BIPOC-owned businesses whenever possible; this may mean divesting from current white-owned businesses you work with
- Hire Black experts to help you with internal organizational work
 - Hire Black consultants to host workshops that train CDSS members in anti-racism work, especially as a resource to organizers
 - Hire Black consultants to help you author and implement arts policy, to train your staff, board, affiliates and members, to scrutinize your work and develop content, etc.
- Engage CDSS members in the budget process
 - Have a well-advertised and genuine member participation and comment period on your annual budget

Community Members Need More from You

We labored to write this letter because we care deeply about CDSS as an organization and the future of our beloved folkways. It is written with humility, knowing that we don't have all the answers and we, too, are often uncertain about how to navigate in ways that reduce harm and transform poisoned systems. Our intention is not to publicly shame you, nor is it to cancel¹³ you and your work. In fact, it is in solidarity with you and with earnest desire to facilitate real change in a system that seems so stuck. We are writing from a place of paradox:

¹¹ From the National Center on Disability and Journalism's Disability Language Style Guide: <https://bit.ly/3i5ahZ4>.

¹² *Cultural equity* work means that you're addressing the legacy of structural discrimination and actively dismantling the organizational norms that have created disadvantages for groups of people (based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, class, citizenship status, etc.).

¹³ "*Cancel culture* refers to the popular practice of withdrawing support for (*canceled*) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive. *Cancel culture* is generally discussed as being performed on social media in the form of group shaming." Found at dictionary.com.

This is a call in; the community needs you to stop and reflect before you do anything else. You are causing harm. We need you to take time to do this work effectively because of your power and influence.

But, please know that this is also a call out. We are enraged to see so much energy and so many resources fall face-first into this obvious misstep.

If you feel you are being asked to reorient the entire organization to focus on a group of people who haven't been included because we stole from them, abused them, then left them out, then yes, you're right. We are asking you to center the history, participation, and contributions of Black people to American Folkways.

We urge you to be a leader in decolonizing our folkways.

We urge you to recognize your complicity in mainstreaming whitewashing and cultural appropriation. We urge you to acknowledge, apologize, and engage in effective anti-racist work. Anything else is an incredible disservice to CDSS affiliates and members. Anything else is an affront to the many contributors who have been erased from history--and are still being erased.

We understand that this letter has some big asks. You might be tempted to fall back on the myth that "change takes time." Consider that this year alone, millions of people changed their lives quickly and effectively when an urgent need was presented in the form of a global pandemic. We're still in the midst of these changes and the majority of the people in this folk community have adapted---and quickly. When there is an urgent need, change can occur lightning fast. We urge you to resist the slow pace of institutionalism that consistently holds all of you back, especially your most creative and thoughtful staff and board members.

Your members are attuned to knowing when something is said for political reasons or when something is genuine. Right now, the community is talking amongst itself about these communications and saying many of the things we've outlined in this letter. We urge you to genuinely engage in this work now, or simply let us all know that you have chosen not to. You have a responsibility to be forthright with us.

Respectfully,

Dela Murphy & Dana Parkinson

The original communications from CDSS are attached.

Note: This is an open letter to the Board and Staff of Country Dance and Song Society authored by Dana Parkinson and Dela Murphy. Should it be published indirectly by anyone but its authors, it should be published in its entirety and attributed to its authors. Infographics used in this work are owned by their creators and should be attributed to their creators and shared independently only with express permission where applicable.



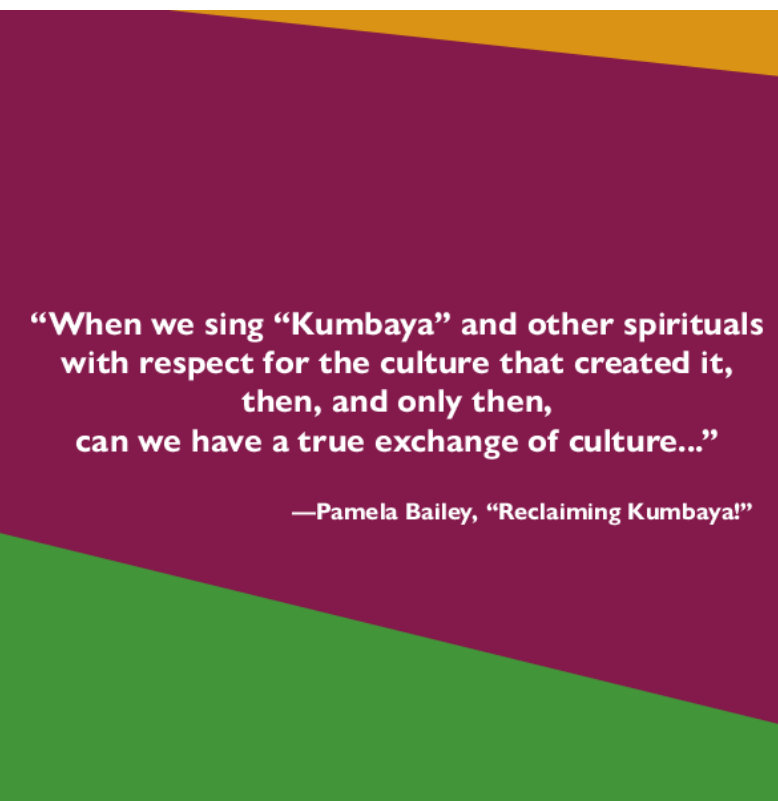
[Click here to view this email as a webpage.](#)



Dear friends,

Black lives matter. There is an ongoing history of racism and cultural appropriation in our dance, music, and song traditions. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to educate (and re-educate) ourselves and our communities about these past and present issues, in order to work together toward more just and equitable spaces in our living traditions for everyone.

We want to use our social media platforms to amplify the voices and work of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. Today, we're starting by sharing some articles about recognizing folk songs that have been appropriated from Black culture and ideas for re-teaching them using their full histories.



[“Reclaiming Kumbaya!” by Pamela Bailey](#)

; shares the history of “Kumbaya” and explores how we can respect the true meanings of songs like it.

[“A Conversation with Rhiannon Giddens,” by Brandi Waller-Pace](#)

; discusses connections between common American kids songs and blackface minstrelsy.

We are grateful to [Decolonizing the Music Room](#) for creating these resources. You can find loads more in their [songs and stories archive](#)!





[Click here to view this email as a webpage.](#)



Dear friends,

Last week, we emailed you all with a [statement of our support](#) for the Black Lives Matter movement and some brief thoughts on how anti-racism work intersects with our own traditions and communities. We think it's most **important to listen and learn from Black voices** right now. We also want to remain accountable to our community, and encourage all of us to do this work together.

In the past week, many of you asked what CDSS is specifically doing to combat racism in our work. We agree that it's important to share what we're doing with you! We also acknowledge that we don't have much practice at sharing about our work while we're in the middle of doing it. More often than not, we like to complete a project and then tell you about it all at once. But anti-racism work is ongoing and complex. It's really important for us all to talk about the journey we are undertaking. We don't want to do this work alone, and progress will be greater if we work together, share what we are learning, and challenge each other along the way. That is how we move forward together.

Here's a look at some of our ongoing work to enact our [core value of Inclusivity](#) and combat racism:

- In February of this year, the Board initiated development of an **inclusivity statement for CDSS**. Staff members researched inclusivity and equity statements from organizations similar to ours, began drafting, and solicited feedback from select members of our community who could provide a variety of perspectives. Right now, we are incorporating that feedback and settling on a final version that we will share with our wider community. Staff has established a team to develop **plans for implementing this statement** throughout our programs and operations.
- In April, we had our first **equity training session for the full Board and staff**, and we are committed to continuing with additional sessions.
- We are **amplifying the work of Black traditional music and dance artists** on our Facebook page. Send us a message there; we'd love to share your favorite artists, too!
- This week, we are creating a new **inclusivity section of the Resource Portal**. This section will include links to articles, podcasts, videos, and other resources about the intersection of race and traditional dance and song. We plan to have the section live next week and will send more info then! (This section will also include resources about different intersections: gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) In the meantime, you can [submit a resource](#) to be included.
- Recognizing that true change must include the whole community, [CDSS Community Grant funds can now be used for equity and anti-racism training](#) for local dance organizer teams. Priority will be given to CDSS Affiliates. Moving forward, we will expand this funding to other capacity-building efforts.
- We are **owning our history**. Cecil Sharp's work teaching English Country dance and documenting songs and dances from people in Appalachia (1916-1918) inspired a group of Americans to create the organization that later became CDSS. Sharp was a passionate student of English and Anglo-American folk traditions who boldly ventured into white mountain communities and collected their music with great care and respect... **and... Sharp's racist and anglo-centric worldview impacted the way he told the world about his journeys, and meant that he missed the opportunity to fully understand and document the complex evolution of dance, music, and song on this continent**. Additionally, his incomplete understanding set a false narrative that many song collectors and folk dance historians adopted without question, and that was later reinforced and legitimized during the folk revival.¹ This is just one example of how the full history of traditional music and dance has been obscured for many years. **We are committed to elevating resources that represent a broader, more accurate understanding of traditional dance, music, and song on this continent**.
- We are open to feedback. The vast majority of our staff, Board, and community is white. **We will mess up. We will listen. We will keep going. Thank you for being here with us.**

Here are ways you can further anti-racism work in your communities:

- **Commit to learning more!** Most of us know a very whitewashed history of the traditions we participate in. There are loads of things to read, watch, and listen to that can help us see a more full picture of the ongoing history of traditional dance and song in North America. A selection of these resources is below, and more will be listed in our Resource Portal ASAP. We'd love to include your favorite resources on these topics! [Submit those here](#).
- **Listen to Black, Brown, and Indigenous people** singing and playing a variety of American folk traditions. Buy their music!
- **For Organizers:** Publicly [state your support of anti-racism work](#). Share anti-racism resources with your community. Organize equity training sessions for your board and volunteers. And remember that if you [apply for a CDSS grant](#), we'll help you pay for it!
- **For Participants:** Get involved! Find out if you can join your local organization's board, or volunteer in another way to help your community engage in this work. And talk about the things you're learning with the folks you sing and dance with!

For further reading and listening:

- [8 Ways to Become a Decolonizing Agent](#), from Decolonizing the Music Room
- [Community and Connection](#), Rhiannon Giddens's Keynote Address at IBMA 2017
- [Sing, Don't Shout—An Alternative Approach](#), from Crys Matthews
- [Addressing Racism as a Dance Community](#), from Portland Intown Contra Dance
- [Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics](#), by Phil Jamison

On behalf of the [CDSS Staff](#),

Katy German
Executive Director

¹ Filene, Benjamin. *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.